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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001863

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iraq - Bush Strategy
Nuclear Issues - India Transatlantic Ties
PARIS - Thursday, March 23, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iraq - Bush Strategy
Nuclear Issues - India
Transatlantic Ties

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

As the confrontation lingers between PM Villepin, the unions and students, yesterday's rumors that Sarkozy might be thinking about leaving the government are quelled in the wake of his interview in weekly Paris Match entitled "Different But He Stands United." Says Match: "As President of the UMP he favors a single employment contract, but as Minister of the Interior he stands alongside Villepin." Says Sarkozy: "In a country that professes equality, specificity becomes a problem. While I stand in solidarity (behind the government) I am also aware of how deep the misunderstandings are. I suggest a six-month trial period for the CPE. France is ready for change, it just needs to have these changes explained. And no, I will not leave the government even if things get worse. One does not leave the government through opportunism. But one can leave the government if there is a profound disagreement." Popular right-of-center France Soir leads with the headline: "To Die for Villepin? Never," next to a photograph of a determined Sarkozy. Le Figaro emphasizes the fact that "The CPE Is Dividing the Majority." The editorial is entitled: "Fitting a Square Peg in a Round Hole." Alexis Bezet compliments Villepin "for extending a hand" and wanting to establish a dialogue, but wonders: "Considering where things stand, can the dialogue be re-established?"

While most editorials are devoted to domestic issues, Le Monde devotes its editorial to President Bush "who is caught in a net. and is paying for his and his administration's errors. Bush's fortune, the fact he cannot run for another term, is also his handicap. Continued bad news from Iraq could well lose the elections for his Republican friends." (See Part C)

In Le Figaro, weekly columnist Alexandre Adler titles his op-ed "A New Transatlantic Quarrel?" Adler contends there is a new quarrel between the U.S. and Great Britain over the Joint Strike Fighter, which has spilled over to the Washington-London relationship. (See Part C)

Liberation carries an op-ed by senior editor Jacques Amalric on "Bush and his nuclear swerve towards India" and La Croix carries an op-ed entitled "China and India, Partners but Rivals." (See Part C)

The Council of Europe Summit taking place today and tomorrow in Brussels, leads Le Figaro to say that even though industrial protectionism is not officially on the agenda, President Chirac intends to deny accusation of protectionism but will defend France's right to economic patriotism. The British Minister for European Affairs, Douglas Alexander, pens an op-ed in today's Le Figaro in which he says that "economic protectionism is harmful for Europe."

All media outlets tell the story of how Washington had France's nuclear programs under surveillance between 1945 and 1987. Says France Soir: "While this spying hardly constitutes a surprise, its extent is nonetheless astonishing."

La Croix reports on the trial in Afghanistan of an Afghan who converted to Catholicism (forbidden by Islamic law) and which elicits concerns from Washington, Berlin and Rome. "Such a trial, the first since the end of the Taliban regime, has western nations up in arms because they consider that an execution for such motives would be a regression with regard to the democratic process they are trying to develop in Afghanistan."

Julia Ficatier of La Croix reports on a documentary to be shown this evening on France 2 television on the Muhammad caricatures and how "Denmark's imams used ambassadors from the

Arab world posted in Denmark to relay the story to their home countries. The most diligent, a woman ambassador from Egypt is, according to report, in disgrace and now serving in South Africa."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iraq - Bush Strategy

"Bush Caught in a Net"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its unsigned editorial (03/23): "It takes a big dose of hypocrisy or blindness not to see the impasse of American politics. Iraq is on the verge of civil war without the American army being able to bring back a semblance of order. If the army stays, it will fuel anti-American sentiment, which is in turn used by the rebels to support their actions. If the army leaves, it will abandon Iraq to a dangerous fate. Whatever he says, Mr. Bush is paying the price for the errors of his administration before the Iraqi conflict. Ignorance of the region, a messianic vision, or even democratic dogmatism all contributed to make an explosive cocktail. Today the neo-conservatives' dreams are crumbling and they are trying to blame the fiasco on the President's entourage by saying that it is not the policy that was bad, it's the implementation that was all wrong. This is an interim step before they actually turn against the President, and choose another champion for their cause. Mr. Bush's advantage is that he cannot run for a third term, but this is also his handicap. In the November mid-term elections his Republican friends may lose, thereby turning him into a mere puppet president for his last two years in office."

Nuclear Issues - India

"Bush's Nuclear Swerve Towards India"

Jacques Amalric in left-of-center Liberation (03/23): "America's move which in fact rehabilitates a nation considered to be a pariah by the NTP signatories, comes at the worst possible time. Considering the situation with Iran and North Korea, the U.S. can easily be accused of using double standards. President Bush's answer is that India is a democracy. He will also use another argument before a yet-to-be-convinced Congress: because the U.S. cannot develop a commercial nuclear program in the U.S., because of the ecologists, then the next best thing is to do it in India through Westinghouse and GE. While this is true, President Bush's wager does not take into account that this could trigger a new nuclear race in Asia, starting with Pakistan. President Bush has probably not read John Kennedy's call to 'abolish nuclear arms before they abolish us.'"

"China and India, Partners But Rivals"

Henri Madelin in Catholic La Croix (03/23): "China and India are the two Asian giants benefiting the most from globalization. In the competition pitting these two rivals one against the other, India has just scored thanks to Bush's visit. The nuclear agreement means that the U.S. is going to use India to try and contain China's irresistible progression. New Delhi is indeed living an 'Indian summer,' as Washington uses India as a counterweight for both China and Islamism."

Transatlantic Ties

"A New Transatlantic Quarrel?"

Alexandre Adler in right-of-center Le Figaro (03/23): "There is a new quarrel between the U.S. and Great Britain over the Joint Strike Fighter. and a competition between Boeing and Mac Donnell Douglas on the one hand, and British Aerospace, a main stockholder of Airbus on the other. The U.S. aerospace lobby does not want American money to finance Airbus through British Aerospace. Till now, allied concerns have saved the day. But now President Bush is sacrificing the 'special relationship' it has with London. With the Iranian crisis in the background, it would appear that London's optimism (in favor of a diplomatic solution that includes Russia) is coming up against Israel's understandable intransigence. supported by Washington. It may also be that there is an on going battle between Rice and Cheney over this. London's position has fueled the fires. The quarrel over the JSF will not last. but it does represent an opportunity for the Europeans to take the measure of the crisis and bet on Europe's strategic independence based on a London-Berlin-Paris triangle that may at last be more than just a dream." STAPLETON